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# Donovan Acts as Plan Fails at Bay of Pigs

## Reveals Kennedy's Appreciation in Release of 1,113 Prisoners from Castro's Cuba

Myths and mystery have grown out of James B. Donovan's success in negotiating the exchange of a Russian master spy for an American spy pilot and the release of 1,113 Bay of Pigs prisoners from Castro's dungeons. The truth, however, is as fascinating as any fiction. This is the third of a series in which THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE presents the facts, both of the negotiations and the controversial Bay of Pigs tragedy itself.

BY CHESLY MANLY

**F**IDEL CASTRO'S release of 1,113 Cuban prisoners captured in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion attempt, in exchange for 53 million dollars worth of drugs and baby food, was negotiated by James B. Donovan. The Kennedy administration aided this ransom deal because of what Donovan describes as a sense of "moral responsibility" for the Bay of Pigs tragedy.

"President Kennedy called me after it was over and congratulated me, and I feel sure that he felt that it was discharging what he regarded as a very heavy moral obligation on his part," Donovan told this reporter.

Because of his success in negotiating the exchange of Rudolf Abel, Russian super spy, for Francis Gary Powers, the American U-2 spy pilot, Donovan, in June, 1962, was urged by members of the Cuban Families committee to undertake negotiations with Castro for the release of the Bay of Pigs prisoners.

"What happened at the Bay of Pigs," Donovan said in an interview, "was the fact that these people's sons had been recruited by the United States, had been sent in with the approval of the United States, and then—without getting into detail—had been literally abandoned by the United States and permitted to run out of ammunition on the beach, and they had been imprisoned for 15 months."

Donovan was asked whether he agreed, as some have charged, that President Kennedy's sense of moral responsibility amounted to a feeling of guilt.

"Well, I think 'guilt' could be used but it's just another way of expressing the same thing," Donovan replied.

### Reviews Disaster at Cuba's Bay of Pigs

A brief review of the Bay of Pigs disaster is in order before taking up Donovan's negotiations with Castro. The purpose

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in "A Thousand Days," by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., and Kennedy, by Theodore C. Sorensen, two new books by former White House assistants. Schlesinger, a professional historian, was directly involved in the Bay of Pigs affair and his account is better than Sorensen's.

Both authors agree that the Bay of Pigs invasion, on April 17, 1961, by about 1,400 Cuban exiles, who had been trained at a base in Guatemala, could not have succeeded without effective air cover and that President Kennedy had excluded participation by United States ground or air forces. Under the Kennedy invitation, the United States would take the Cuban brigade to the beaches and that would be all.

A significant fact which is not recognized—indeed is denied—by both Schlesinger and Sorensen is that United States air cover was included in the invasion plan inherited by the Kennedy administration from the Eisenhower administration.

### Sorensen Says Air Corps Was Never in the Plan

Sorensen simply says air cover was never in the plan. Schlesinger says the Eisenhower administration's "ground rule" prohibited "United States participation in combat."

Neither author even mentions the late Whiting Willauer, who was in charge of planning for the Cuban invasion under the Eisenhower administration.

As ambassador to Honduras, Willauer had directed planning for the operation in which anti-communist exiles led by Col. Carlos Castillo Armas overthrew the communist-dominated Arbenz regime in Guatemala in 1954.

He testified under oath before the Senate internal security subcommittee that when the Eisenhower administration put him in charge of preparations for the Cuban invasion he enlisted the cooperation of the joint chiefs of staff and was assured



Bowles (left) and Burke



Rusk (left) and Willauer

by the JCS that the United States would provide air cover for the operation.

Willauer testified that his junior partner in the project was Tracy Barnes, of the Central Intelligence Agency. On Jan. 26, 1961, he said, Dean Rusk, the new secretary of state, and Chester Bowles, the new undersecretary, asked him to continue as coordinator of the project.

### Realizes the Squeeze Is On

Willauer soon realized, however, that he was being squeezed out. Rusk, Bowles, and other top state department officials refused to see him. About the middle of February, he was asked to leave the state department and to fly off Cuba. They

you anymore. Finally, just before the Bay of Pigs landing, a minor state department functionary called him and told him he had been fired.

Schlesinger reports that in January, 1961, "a JCS paper, tacitly questioning the basis of United States participation in military operations, discussed possible levels of involvement. But he says this paper was 'shuffled aside in the confusion of the changeover.'"

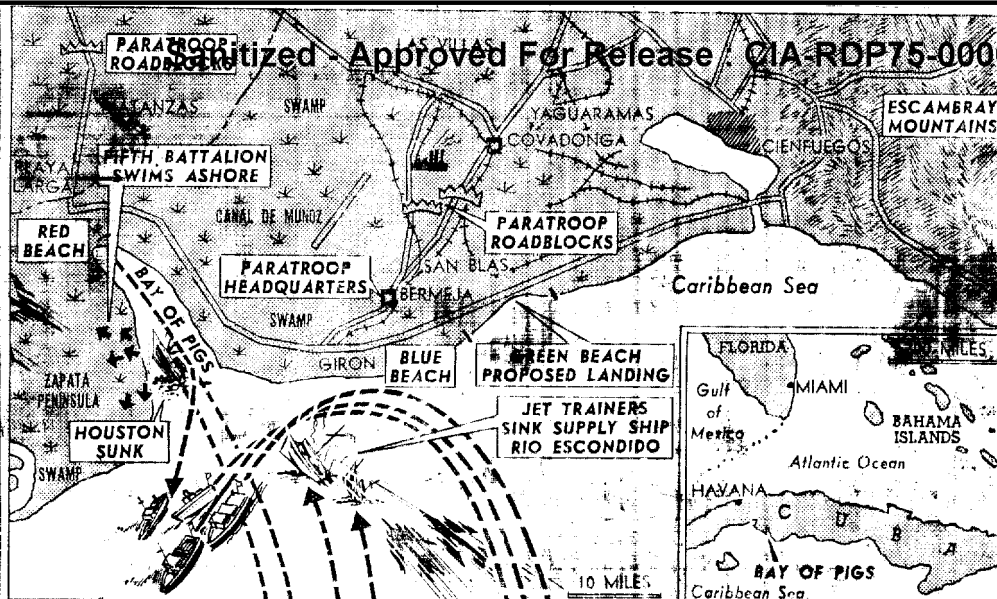
He reports that Gen. Lemnitzer, chairman of the JCS, "tried to renew discussion of alternatives ranging from minimum to maximum United States involvement" when the plan was exposed to leading members of the new administration on Jan. 22. But when President Kennedy reviewed the plan six days later, according to Schlesinger "the ground rule against United States participation was still to prevail."

### Reports Talk with Kennedy

Schlesinger gives this account of a conversation he had with President Kennedy:

"So far as the operation itself was concerned, he felt, as he told me that afternoon, that it

Continued



Legends on map tell of events and disposition of Fidel Castro's troops which led to the failure of Bay of Pigs invasion in April, 1961. Failure of American jet planes to provide air cover for invaders led to their eventual capture by Castro forces.

down from a grandiose amphibious assault to a mass infiltration . . . he supposed that the cost, both military and political, of failure was now reduced to a tolerable level. He added, "If we have to get rid of these 800 men [the number was increased later to 1,400], it is much better to dump them in Cuba than in the United States, especially if that is where they want to go."

Schlesinger emphasized that both the JCS and the CIA approved the plan and predicted success for it in spite of President Kennedy's ban on United States military participation. He suggested, however, that the JCS and CIA believed "events might override the President's stipulations" and wished to avoid a discussion "which would only tie him all the more definitely to nonintervention."

President Kennedy asserted at a press conference, on April 12, that there would "not be, under any conditions, an intervention in Cuba by the United States armed forces."

He sent emissaries to Dr. Jose Miro Cardona, head of the Cuban revolutionary council, to make it clear that United States participation could not be expected.

#### Leaders Assured of Help

Nevertheless, as Schlesinger acknowledges, leaders of the invasion brigade in Guatemala were assured by CIA representatives that the United States would provide air cover and any other help necessary for success of the operation.

The Kennedy administration's plan called for pre-invasion air strikes from bases in Nicaragua by Cuban pilots in World War II B-26 planes to neutralize

Castro's small air force. After the first strike, two days before the landing, there would be an interval for U-2 overflights to assess damage, and a second strike would follow at dawn on April 17, immediately preceding the landing. As part of a "cover story," it would be announced that the Cuban pilots were defectors from Castro's air force.

At dawn on Saturday, April 15, eight B-26s attacked three Cuban airfields, and when the pilots returned to Nicaragua they reported great success. Overflights the next day, however, showed only five aircraft definitely destroyed, out of Castro's estimated total air strength of 15 B-26s, 10 Sea Furies, and four T-33 jet trainers, armed with .50 caliber machine guns.

#### Stevenson Is Indignant

Adlai Stevenson, acting on instructions from Washington, assured the United Nations on Saturday that the air strike that morning was made, "to the best of our knowledge," by genuine defectors from Castro's air force. By Sunday, however, as Schlesinger reports, "the CIA cover story was cracking" and "Stevenson was understandably indignant."

Schlesinger adds that Secretary Rusk, "remorseful at the position into which state had thrust its UN ambassador, now resolved that the Cuban adventure should not be permitted further to jeopardize the larger interests of United States foreign policy."

Secretary Rusk, it appears, felt that United States foreign policy had larger interests than the Bay of Pigs. The United States satellite on the United States doorstep. At all events, accord-

ing to Schlesinger, Rusk persuaded President Kennedy to cancel the second air strike by Cuban pilots, which was scheduled to precede the invasion the next morning.

#### Hope of Surprise Ends

Early Monday morning, when frogmen from the transports began marking invasion points on three beaches along a 40-mile stretch of the Cuban shore, they encountered a militia patrol and rifle shots destroyed the hope of tactical surprise.

Castro's air force, alerted by the shots, went into action against both the ships and the men on the beaches. The invasion brigade's slow World War II B-26s were no match for Castro's T-33 jets, which shot four of them down. At 9:30 a. m. a Sea Fury sank the ship carrying the brigade's ammunition reserve and most of its communications equipment.

After the disastrous effects of President Kennedy's cancellation of the second air strike against Castro's air fields had been demonstrated by the events of Monday, the President reinstated the second strike for Tuesday morning. As Sorensen reports, however, "a cloud cover made this postponement fatal."

It was clear, after the failure of the second air strike Tuesday morning, that the brigade was in serious trouble. The administration learned Tuesday afternoon that 20,000 Castro troops, with artillery and tanks, were moving to encircle the invaders.

#### Propose Carrier Strike

At a White House meeting on Tuesday, April 18, J. Edgar Hoover, J. Lee Burke, chief of naval operations, and Richard Bissell of the

said this would knock out the T-33s and free the brigade's B-26s to deal with Castro's tanks.

The President refused, but authorized a compromise half-measure. Six unmarked jets from the Essex would fly over the beaches for one hour Wednesday morning to provide cover for a B-26 attack from Nicaragua. The jets would not seek air combat or attack ground targets, but they could defend the brigade planes from air attack.

Schlesinger says the President "probably permitted this single relaxation of his ban against the use of United States armed force in the hope that it might make possible the evacuation of the brigade from the beachhead."

In Nicaragua, the Cuban pilots were exhausted from 48 hours of nearly continuous runs over the beachhead. A few refused to go out on what seemed a suicide mission, and American pilots, under contract to the CIA, took their places. Because of a mixup in communications, the B-26s arrived over the beachhead an hour ahead of their jet support from Essex. Without jet cover, most of them were shot down by the T-33s and four Americans were killed.

#### Brigade Is Doomed

The brigade was doomed. Without ammunition, it was quickly rounded up by Castro's troops. As Sorensen writes, "while the lack of ammunition led directly to the disaster, Castro's control of the air had led directly to the lack of ammunition."

The following lines from Hamlet's soliloquy are familiar:

"Thus conscience does not  
cowards of us all.  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied over with the pale  
cast of thought;  
And enterprises of great oith  
and moment,  
With this regard their currents  
turn awry,  
And lose the name of action."

This is the image of President Kennedy that emerges from accounts of the Bay of Pigs tragedy by two members of his administration who were among his closest friends and greatest admirers.